



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

THE MEANING OF "RELIGION" AND THE PLACE OF MYSTICISM IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

DETERMINED attempts have been made recently to extend the meaning of the term religion so as to make it synonymous with "the consciousness of the highest values." "All moral ideals," it is said, "are religious in the degree to which they are expression of great vital interests of society." Whoever seeks the welfare of society is religious. This view¹ fails to recognize the significance of the difference in psychological attitude that separates the adherents of any organized religion from the devoted agnostic or atheistic social worker;² it means the identification of morality with religion, as well as the obliteration of the radical distinction that exists between magic and religion. For, in that understanding, when magic is not practised in the interest of an individual but of a group, it is no longer separable from religion.³ Nothing in the recent deepened understanding of the rôle played by social consciousness in human development, and especially in the origin of religion, excuses this utter confusion of aspects of human life long ago separated by the application of different names.

¹ Set forth in France with great power and learning by Durkheim and his followers, the position has been taken up in this country by Irving King in his *Development of Religion* and by Edward S. Ames in *The Psychology of Religious Experience*. The preceding quotations are from this last book.

² The present time offers numberless instances of utter devotion to the public good by those whose affection and thought do not rise above humanity. This fact is probably the most important of the many great, omnipresent facts of which Christian traditions obscure the view. It can not be said, on the whole, that during the Great War the majority of the steadfast friends of humanity who fought generously for the betterment of mankind have been those who felt themselves in the kind of personal relation with God that is implied in the established Christian worship. Russia, in the decades preceding the Great Conflict, was of itself a sufficient illustration of the degree of heroic sacrifice to which the love of man may prompt, without reference to God or to immortality.

³ Ames writes, "It would be no exaggeration to say that all ceremonies in which the whole group cooperates with keen emotional interest are religious." *Loc. cit.*, p. 72.

In our understanding of the term (and we think that we are in agreement with the dominant usage), religion can not begin before the birth of some conception, however vague, of superhuman personal power or powers, whose existence is felt to be a matter of moment. Before that time, any ceremony that may have been performed was either merely social or magical. The contradiction which such religions as Buddhism and the Religion of Humanity of Comte seem to inflict to the affirmation that the notion of divinities in relation with man is necessary to the existence of the institutions is merely apparent. Original Buddhism died almost with its founder. Most of his disciples promptly deified and worshipped him; a small number remembered his teaching and continued to do him honor *as if* he were living. There are reasons to hold that these would long ago have given up their commemoration were it not for the support they get from the mass of the worshippers. As to the Religion of Humanity, it no longer exists. Comte's disciples lived in a time when the deification of man was no longer possible. They went as far as they could towards the personification of the *Grand Etre*, but they were on the whole too clear-sighted to find it possible to go as far as necessary for success.

The main cause⁴ of this unfortunate effort to do away with real differences is, I think, the conviction that metaphysical concepts are derived, whereas social relations are fundamental, and that, consequently, you may disregard religious metaphysical conceptions, when they prove untenable, without surrendering that which is primary in religious life, namely the social interests involved in the discarded metaphysical view of the world. However justifiable that conviction may be, it does in no way legitimize the transformation of the historical meaning of the word religion. If "religion" were to be used to denote all social forms of behavior, a new word would have to be found for those forms of behavior that involve belief in and relation with superhuman, anthropopathic beings. No such term has ever been suggested by the writers whom we criticize; they have apparently no use for one. "Religion" should continue to mean what it has meant in the past; and the expressions "social values," "social ceremony," "social work," should continue to designate those aspects of social activity which involve neither a conscious relation with superhuman powers nor the use of a magical force.

The appearance of beliefs in anthropopathic, intelligent agents

⁴ In certain influential quarters the extension of the meaning of the term religion to all social work, has back of it nothing more respectable than the desire to avoid the obloquy which attaches to those who do not describe themselves as religious.

in relation with man was most probably prepared by pre-religious, purely social practises. If it may be supposed that such practises ever existed without some sense of a transtribal power or powers, it may with much stronger reason be held than an increasingly clear notion of transhuman, personal power developed out of them, and that thus a certain god-idea arose.⁵

Some of the religious practises themselves were, doubtless, derived from pre-religious, merely social ceremonies. But since religion has reference to personal agents (willing, thinking, and feeling beings) some at least of these ceremonies had to be modified in order to fit the new relation. In other instances, the derivation of religious from purely social ceremonies consisted merely in the ascription of a new meaning. One can readily understand that, for instance, dances born of the play-impulse and built up under the influence of the love of rhythm, of rivalry, and of other elemental tendencies, came to be looked upon as efficacious either in a magical or a religious way.

As it is hardly possible to define religion without indicating its relation to magic, we shall say very briefly how magic is to be differentiated on the one hand from merely social behavior, and on the other from religion. Magic implies the action of an impersonal power, which, however, may be wielded by a person and made to act upon a person. It acts by coercion and not by successful appeal to feeling or intelligence. From the mechanical forces as known to the civilized man, the magical power differentiates itself in that neither a quantitative nor qualitative relation is necessarily implied between it and its effects. In the mechanical type of behavior (throwing a stone, fording a stream, bending a bow) observed at any degree whatever of culture, the existence of a quantitative relation between cause and effects is implied. When fording a stream, for instance, instead of relying entirely upon his own strength, the savage may seek by promises or other anthropopathic means to move a spirit into assisting him. In that case he behaves religiously. Or he may repeat some formula, perform various gestures that will bring him the help desired independently of the intervention of any spirit, or through the coercion of a spirit. In that case he acts magically.⁶ To confuse these two types of be-

⁵ In *A Psychological Study of Religion* I have considered several probable origins of the god-ideas. See Chapters V. and VI.

⁶ For a detailed comparative study of magic and religion, see Part II. of *A Psychological Study of Religion*. The substance of that Part was already contained in an earlier essay entitled *The Psychological Origin and the Nature of Religion*, London, Archbald Constable & Co., 1909. A quite similar view of magic and religion is set forth in Edwin Sidney Hartland's *Ritual and Belief*, New York, Scribner, 1914.

havior is to fail to apprehend one of the fundamental differences that can exist in human experience.

If there be a phase in human development when the separation into impersonal and personal powers does not yet exist, then, at that time, some pre-religious form of behavior and thought is present, but not religion. How can we know when primitive man has made that distinction? By the presence of the two modes of behavior: one persuasive, the other coercitive. When he supplicates or offers food, he may fairly be said to think himself in relation with a personal power.

With this brief statement of the nature of religion and of its relation to merely social behavior and to magic, we turn to the relation of mysticism to religion. But what are we to understand by that much abused word "mysticism"? An experience taken to mean contact (not through the senses but "immediately") or union of the self with a larger-than-self, be it called the spirit world, God, or the Absolute, is for us a mystical experience. Any form of worship through which that experience is thought to be secured will, therefore, be regarded by us as mystical worship.

No one doubts that mysticism as defined above is included in the meaning of the term religion. But divergences exist as to whether all religions are mystical; or, as some put it, whether mysticism is not at the root of every religion, so that in its absence no religion would have come into existence and, with its withdrawal, all religions would die off.⁷ The answer we shall give to this question will follow logically from the genetic connection which seems to us to exist between mysticism and a certain group of innate tendencies.

From the point of view of the kind of social relation to which they prompt, the most important instincts and instinctive tendencies may be classified under two heads: those that would separate individuals and those that would bring them together. On the

⁷ William James, for instance, affirms, that "personal religious experience has its root and center in mystical consciousness," *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, page 379. Similarly, William Hocking writes of the mystics, "their technique which is the refinement of worship, often the exaggeration of worship, is at the same time the essence of all worship," *Mind*, Vol. XXI., N. S., p. 39. Delacroix, who in the preface to *Etudes d'Histoire et de Psychologie du Mysticisme* says that mysticism, understood as the immediate apprehension of the divine, is "at the origin of all religion," recognizes nevertheless, on page 306, that "The Christianity of Bossuet excludes the Christian mysticism of Mme. Guyon. One can not deny that there are here two different forms of Christianity." He opens a more recent article on *Le Mysticisme et la Religion* with the words, "There exist religions without mysticism." *Scientia*, Vol. XXI., 1917.

one side we find fear and the various reactions expressive of aggression and dislike. On the other, those expressive of curiosity, and of the tender emotion. The former seek satisfaction in disregard, or at the expense of other selves; they lead to methods of life that would separate the individual from the rest of the world. The latter seek cooperation with other selves; their method is that of association and union.

These categories of reaction may each be awakened under different circumstances by the religious objects, and thus two types of religious attitude and behavior come into existence. Mysticism appears to us as the expression in religion of the cooperating, uniting human tendencies.

Animal life began, it seems, with an endowment of conflict-instincts. The appearance of the parental instinct marked probably the introduction of the other type of endowment: the animal family became the cradle of the cooperative method of life. In humanity, the aggressive, self-sharpening attitude was for a long initial period the conspicuous one; the other was called forth mainly, or only, in the narrower circles of family and tribe. Even there, its expression was easily inhibited by the subjugating, destructive instincts. Slowly man discovered the objective value of the good-will and the subjective delight of spiritual union.

Christ's contribution to humanity was in the demonstration he offered of the surpassing value of loving relationship. His rule of conduct recognizes no other than the tendencies making for mutual helpfulness and association of the spirit of love.

These two different methods of life have not found equal application in every one of its phases. In business the aggressive opposition of self to self still prevails. The kind of cooperation by which it seems tempered, is too often for the more successful exploitation of the outsiders. In certain professions, however, such as that of the physician and the teacher, in the purely benevolent social activities, and in the individual love-relation involving the sex passion, the cooperating and uniting tendencies vigorously assert themselves. In religion their expression has culminated in a form of worship seeking complete love-union with the divine object, in such a way that the worshipper and "God" become one: that is the mystical strand in religious life.

The powerful instinctive tendencies that incline man to seek union of will and feeling with other selves receive assistance from two different directions: (1) Striving with resisting other selves and inanimate objects brings recurrent moments of weariness when the zest for the strife disappears. How delightful it is then to close one's eyes to the multiplicity of things, to ignore the challenge of

other wills, to renounce effort and to lose oneself in the silent, peaceful current of undifferentiated life! Both physical and moral causes bring on this inclination to self-surrender. The pace has been too fast and the jaded nerves demand rest. Or dispiriting queries have arisen: "What matters gains and conquests; what boot fortune, knowledge, human loves? Nothing is perfect and nothing endures. Would that I could overcome my spiritual isolation, destroy the barriers that separate me from my fellow men, be one with them, instead of struggling against them." In this mood the will-to-union is given full career.

(2) Mystical worship, rooted in primary instinctive tendencies and abetted by fatigue and moral failure, finds an ally in the natural tendency of thought to seek repose in generalization. Thinking includes a double movement. Consider the man of science or the philosopher; they do their work by alternating analyses and syntheses; they can not do it by one of these alone. There must be observation and discrimination; but when objects have multiplied under the analysing activity of the mind, the severed things must somehow be united again; they must be seen in their connections. And, at least for some men, a unification of all things must be reached; a universe must be built out of the discreet objects. Completed thinking implies these two movements:⁸ sundering and uniting. The analysis may be quite incomplete, and the ultimate generalization may be jumped at without much reference either to facts or logic; but some kind of an all-inclusive principle must be obtained that generates the sense of security belonging to a coherent world.

If religion is constituted by our relations with superhuman powers and if mysticism arises, as we say, from one group only of the instinctive tendencies prompting to intercourse with these powers, then there must be two kinds of religious worship. (1) The worship expressive of defensive purposes and of the sort of self-seeking that keeps man and God separate. Here transaction with God, however earnest, bears the mark of externality; there is no thought of absorption of the self into another self; God and the worshipper remain apart, just as the seller and the buyer in a business transaction. (2) The worship prompted by the tendencies to association, cooperation, union. It assumes the forms characteristic of mystical worship. Thus understood, mystical experience is neither the root nor at the root of all religions; it is one type of religious relation.

⁸ What the relation is between this double movement of thought and the two kinds of instincts mentioned above, is not a problem to be discussed here. **There** is a correspondence in the results; is it merely fortuitous?

The objective kind of religion is well illustrated in the dealings of Anyambie, a West African chief, with his god. "The great man," writes Miss Kingsley, "stood alone, conscious of the weight of responsibility on him of the lives and happiness of his people. He talked calmly, proudly, respectfully to the great god who, he knew, ruled the spirit world. It was like a great diplomat talking to another great diplomat. The grandeur of the thing charmed me."⁹ But, under other circumstances, this same Anyambie might have behaved in a totally different way towards that same god or towards a less clearly defined superhuman world. He might have acted as the Mexican Indians who swallow ten buttons of mescal and sit around a fire, passively enjoying beautiful colored visions and a sense of power and elation incomparably superior to anything earthly. The ceremony might have ended in an orgy in which sex was given satisfaction in a mysterious, sublimating setting. If this should have happened, Anyambie would have passed, in succession, through both the objective and the mystical type of religious experience.

It is quite evident that in early societies these two types of behavior coexist side by side, in complete toleration of each other. In Greece, for instance there was by the side of the religion of the Olympic gods, the mystical mystery cults. But when a particular religion made claim to universality and was able to enforce that claim within wide confines, as in the case of Roman Catholic Christianity, the independent organization of mystical propensity became difficult.

Man is after all, by nature and the physical circumstances of his existence, dominantly spatially minded: in order to think and act, he must objectify. He is not often permitted to lose sight of the opposition of the me and the not-me. For this essential reason, and for others into which this is not the place to enter, the *organization* of religious life assumes mainly the objective, non-mystical form. Provided one does not understand by "non-mystical" the total absence of mystical elements, but merely their subordination, one would be justified in saying that all the great popular religions are of the non-mystical type.

Now these highly organized, dominantly objective religious institutions soon come to realize the danger threatened by the individualism-inspiring mystical tendency. In his search for God, the mystic goes his own way. If need be, he will brush aside formulas, rites, and even the priest who would serve him as mediator. And

⁹ Mary H. Kingsley, "The Forms of Apparitions in West Africa," *Proc. Soc. for Psychical Research*, Vol. XIV., 1898, pp. 334-335.

he issues from the divine union with a superior sense of divine knowledge: he holds that ultimate truth has been revealed to him. Persons of this sort, harboring such convictions, may obviously be dangerous to the stability of any institution that has come to regard its truths as the only truths, and its way of worship as the only way. And so it comes to pass that the more highly institutionalized are the spatially minded religions, the less tolerant they are of mystical piety when it rises beyond the ordinary.

What becomes of the tendency to mystical religion in countries dominated by intolerant, objective religions making claims to universality? The mystically minded seek what expression is permitted them within the established religions. They follow their inclinations as far as the ecclesiastical authorities permit. When sufficiently subservient—either in fact or semblance—as St. Theresa and Marguerite Marie Alacoque, they are tolerated and, at times, even encouraged; when too independent and made intractable by the assurance of divine inspiration, as Mme. Guyon, they are suppressed.

But if the Church is uneasy and watchful in the presence of fully developed mysticism, it is quite hospitable to its rudimentary manifestations. Intercourse between sympathetic people constantly tends to pass from externality to the intimacy of united will and feeling. Hence, whenever the religious object is conceived as a loving Being, it becomes almost impossible for the worshipper not to glide into the trustful, self-surrendering, blessedly reposeful attitude which constitutes the first step towards complete mystical union. And so it comes to pass that the Christian worshipper ever tends to drift into mystical relation¹⁰ with his God. This tendency could not fail to be recognized and even encouraged in a religion whose God is officially a God of love. But though Christianity unites in some measure the traits of both types of worship, it is nevertheless dominantly an objective religion. According to the ritual, the worshipper comes into the presence of his God to acknowledge his sins and to be cleansed from them, to seek protection from bodily and moral harm, to return thanks for God's goodness, to praise him, and to rejoice in the assurance of his favor.

Held in subjection though it is, the mystical impulse performs in Christianity a vivifying function, the value of which can hardly be overestimated; for it represents the action of tendencies in which

¹⁰ It is in the light of the preceding remarks that I understand Delacroix when he speaks of the *présence virtuelle du mysticisme dans la religion, et son effacement souvent presque total et sa libération sitôt que fléchit le mécanisme réducteur*. "Le Mysticisme et la Religion," 2d Part. *Scientia*, Vol. XXII., 1917.

humanity sees its salvation, the tendencies to universal cooperation and love-union.¹¹

Let us say now, as a last word and perhaps a word unnecessary to those who are acquainted with fully developed religious mysticism, that no institution in which the mystical tendencies should remain unchecked could long continue to exist, for it would do too great violence to common sense. The non-mystical and the mystical tendencies *together* make a complete man and a complete religion. The problem of religion (one may say of civilization) is not to be set in terms of the suppression of one or of the other group of tendencies but in terms of their functional relation.

Had I wanted in this paper to indicate the instinctive source of all the main aspects of religious worship, I should have pointed out the presence in human nature of certain innate tendencies such as curiosity and self-abasement, from which arise reverence and admiration, and, by derivation, these conspicuous constituents of worship: praise and adoration. These instinct-emotions are self-regarding neither in the sense implied in fear and the lower aggressive tendencies that are the main roots of the objective religious relations nor in the sense of those other propensities that incite to cooperation and union. Because of their apparent total disinterestedness they are often regarded, mistakenly, I think, as the loftiest expressions of which man is capable.

It will be useful to add some instances of religion representing, as far as possible, the pure objective type. The ancient religions of Egypt, Babylonia, and Palestine contain only meager traces of mysticism. Originally, the God of Israel did not even maintain any relation with individuals; he dealt with the nation as a whole. When personal relations appeared, they remained for a long time external. Certain psalms and the later prophets contain the earliest expressions of mysticism in the religion of Yahweh.¹² Among the Greeks, the worship of the Olympian divinities was altogether non-mystical, and it is an open question how much mysticism is to be found in the Mysteries.

¹¹ It seems to me that no recent student of mysticism has displayed as much insight into the profounder significance of mysticism than Hocking. With regard to this conception of the relation of mysticism to religion and to life in general the reader is referred to chapters XXVII. and XXVIII. (The Principle of Alternation) of *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*.

¹² The mystical practises and theories among the Hebrews before that time did not belong to the religion of Yahweh. They were remnants of other and older cults. We refer, for instance, to the excitement, reaching a contagious frenzy, generated among bands of "prophets" and regarded as a mark of divine possession. See I Sam. X., 5 ff; XIX., 20 ff.

Perhaps no semi-civilized people was ever more free from mysticism, in our sense of the term, than the old Romans. "These people," says J. B. Carter,¹³ "could know nothing of their gods, beyond the activity which the gods manifested in their behalf; nor did they desire to know anything. The essence of religion was the establishment of a definite legal status between these powers and man, and the scrupulous observance of those things involved in the contractual relation, into which man entered with the gods. As in any legal matter, it was essential that this contract should be drawn up with a careful guarding of definition, and an especial regard to the proper address. Hence the great importance of the name of the god, and failing that, the address to the 'Unknown God.' A prayer was therefore a vow (*votum*), in which man, the party of the first part, agreed to perform certain acts to the god, the party of the second part, in return for certain specified services to be rendered. Were these services rendered, man, the party of the first part, was *compos voti*, bound to perform what he had promised. Were these services not rendered, the contract was void. In the great majority of cases the gods did not receive their payment until their work had been accomplished, for their worshippers were guided in this by the natural shrewdness of primitive man, and experience showed that in many cases the gods did not fulfill their portion of the contract which was thrust upon them by the worshippers. There were, however, other occasions, when a slightly different set of considerations entered in. In a moment of battle it might not seem sufficient to propose the ordinary contract, and an attempt was sometimes made to compel the god's action by performing the promised return in advance, and thus placing the deity in the delicate position of having received something for which he ought properly to make return." That is the objective religious relation in all its nakedness.

No one knows better than the Christian mystic himself that the ordinary religious life of Christendom is of another type than the mystical. The founder of Quietism, Molinos, speaks of these two attitudes as "diametrically contrary to one another." There are, he tells us, "two sorts of spiritual persons, internal and external: these seek God without, by discourse, by imagination and consideration: they endeavor mainly to get virtues by many abstinences, maceration of body, and mortification of the senses; bear the presence of God, forming Him present to themselves in their idea of

¹³ *Religious Life of Ancient Rome*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co. 1911. pp. 12-13.

Him, or their imagination, sometimes as a Pastor, sometimes as a Physician, and sometimes as a Father and Lord; they delight to be continually seeking of God, very often making fervent acts of love; and all this is art and meditation.

"But none of these ever arrives by that only to the mystical way, or to the excellence of union, transformation, simplicity, light, peace, tranquillity, and love, as he doth who is brought by the Divine grace, by the mystical way of contemplation.

"These men of learning, who are merely scholastical, don't know what the spirit is, nor what it is to be lost in God; nor are they come yet to the taste of the sweet *ambrosia*, which is in the inmost depth and bottom of the soul, where it keeps its throne, and communicates itself with incredible, intimate, and delicious affluence."¹⁴

Similar statements could be quoted from probably all the great Christian mystics. Anyone interested in the place to be ascribed to mysticism in Christianity should read the account of the great quarrel about quietism in which Bossuet and Fénelon were the great protagonists and poor Mme. Guyon the victim.¹⁵ Bossuet represents here, with undeniable authority, rational, common sense Christianity: a Christianity in which man and God remain face to face with each other—the creature and the creator; the sinner and the Judge, albeit a forgiving and loving Judge!

JAMES H. LEUBA.

BRYN MAWR COLLEGE.

¹⁴ Molinos, *The Spiritual Guide*, John Thomson, Glasgow, 1885. Part I., Chap. I., 54, 65; Part II., Chap. XVIII., pp. 126-127.

¹⁵ An excellent summary of this quarrel will be found in H. Delacroix's *Etude d'Histoire et de Psychologie du Mysticism*, Chap. VIII.

In recent times, Ritschl has altogether rejected mysticism. He "will hear nothing of direct spiritual communion of the soul with God. Pietism in all its forms is an abomination to him. The one way of communion of the soul with God is through His historical manifestation in Jesus Christ, and experience due to a supposed immediate action of the Spirit in the soul can be regarded as an illusion. This is the side of Ritschl's teaching that has been specially taken up and developed by his disciple, Hermann." Professor Orr, as quoted by Garvie in the *Ritschlian Theology*, p. 143.

Of Ritschl's main disciples, Garvie writes, "Kaftan, with Ritschl and Hermann, condemns mysticism in the two types which they describe, both as an attempt to secure union with God conceived as the Absolute, and as an endeavor to be joined through the imagination and the affections to Christ in His glorified state. But in his antagonism to mysticism he is not led, as Ritschl is, to deny there is in Christian experience a mystical element, a real communion of the soul with Christ." *Ibid.*, p. 157. See also Hermann's work, *Verkehr des Christen mit Gott*.